

Charles Stanley: Why Christmas Is So Remarkable

We know Christmas is about giving, yet many of us shortchange ourselves by failing to understand what makes God's gift to us so remarkable

When you think about Christmas, what comes to mind? What memories come flooding back as you encounter the sights, sounds and smells of the season?

Christmas always stirs up powerful memories within my heart, and perhaps it does for you too. Though we may be tempted to focus solely on difficulties we've faced, relationships we've lost or things we should've accomplished, I have discovered how important it is that we choose to think about the blessings God has given us.

The very first Christmas I can remember is when I was 3 years old. My father passed away when I was 9 months old, so my granddad, uncles and aunts came to Danville, Va., during the holidays to see me and help Mother. I recall it as if it were yesterday. They opened the trunk of their car and it was filled with toys for me. I had never seen so many wonderful playthings. That was the most gifts I ever received for Christmas, and one thing was certain: I wanted to begin enjoying all of them as soon as possible!

My children, Andy and Becky, were the same way. They would spend the days leading up to Christmas examining their presents under the tree—reading the names on the tags, shaking the boxes and trying to figure out what was in them. There was a thrill in their hearts that lit up their eyes. Then on Christmas morning, they'd wake up early and rush to the tree to find out what gifts they had received. They wouldn't care about what we were having for breakfast or what was on

television; they just couldn't wait to open those packages and begin playing with all their new toys.

This is true of most children. They see beautifully wrapped presents under the tree and long to see what's inside. What treasures do they hold? What joy is hidden under the colorful paper and bows?

They wouldn't think of simply admiring the packages and leaving them unopened or forgetting them altogether. Yet unfortunately that is exactly what many people do with the greatest gift that has ever been given. They overlook it, choosing instead to dwell on the challenges they face.

This is why some find Christmas to be the most difficult time of year. The absence of loved ones, loneliness, financial pressures, unaccomplished dreams and unmet expectations understandably crush our spirits during a season when we should be rejoicing. But rather than keeping our eyes on the One who has given us all things, we focus on our pain and disappointments—on what we don't have instead of what cannot be taken from us.

Perhaps you've had moments when the stresses, burdens and emotions you've felt have overwhelmed you as well. Realize that the enemy wants to steal your happiness this Christmas, and he does so by making the season about everything *except* the birth of Jesus and the reason He came to earth (see Heb. 2:14-18).

Instead, I want to encourage you by recalling what God provided for us on that wonderful night when He came to dwell among us and changed all of human history. Only when we keep our focus on Him can we truly enjoy the inspiring blessings of Christmas. I believe if we truly understand the gift we were given on that momentous evening when Jesus was born, we will have the hope we need to sustain us even in the most difficult times.

The Making of a Gift

As we delve into what this gift is about, there are three important aspects that reveal how truly wonderful this gift is—aspects that, when we meditate upon them, can unlock the joy God offers us not only at Christmastime, but all through the year.

1. **Our gift was from the Father.** In the Bible's most familiar verse, Jesus teaches us, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NASB). As well-known as this Scripture is, consider its meaning in light of that historic Bethlehem night. We received a gift *from the Father*—the creator and sustainer of all things. Some presents you receive are important because of the people who gave them to you. Maybe the provider was a loved one or someone in a position of respect. You were thankful that they thought of you, picked out something special and made sacrifices so you would be happy.

But none of them compare to the Lord God Almighty, who Revelation 17:14 tells us, is "Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." Isn't it humbling to know we have His attention and favor? There is no higher, more wonderful gift we can receive than the one He has given because there is no one above Him (see Ps. 95:3-6). He bestows what nobody else can and what you need most—forgiveness for your sins. In fact, His is the only offering of salvation that is absolutely acceptable, perfect, priceless and everlasting (see John 10:27-29; Heb. 10:10-14).

2. **Our gift was motivated by God's awesome, unconditional love for you.** Romans 5:8 says God demonstrated "His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The Lord did not want you to remain

unforgiven in your transgressions and eternally separated from Him (see Is. 59:2). So He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as a living sacrifice for your iniquities. *That* is why we celebrate the baby in the manger at Bethlehem. It's not about the pageants, parties, presents or even other people. Christmas is God's gift of love *for you*.

Stop and think about the depth of affection He showed you there—how much He sacrificed and the pain He endured on your behalf. Although Jesus is the Son of God, He willingly “emptied Himself” by coming to earth and “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”—all because of His love for you (Phil. 2:6-8). If you've been looking for a love that never ends, accepts you as you are, brings out the very best in you and perseveres regardless of the storms in life, then realize *you already have it through your Savior, Jesus Christ*.

The Great I AM, the God of all creation—the One to which every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord—*loves you*. He is always thinking of you, understands you inside and out, and longs to lead you in the best path possible (see Ps. 139). He holds nothing back; rather, He gives Himself to you wholeheartedly so your joy may be absolutely complete (see John 15:11; Rom. 8:31-32).

This brings us to the third and most important reason you should focus on God's gift to you this Christmas rather than the surroundings of the season:

3. **Our gift is priceless because of *Whom we have been given***. The Father has given us no less than the One “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named” (Eph. 1:21)—His only Son, Jesus. And as Romans 8:32 reminds us, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all,

how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

Therefore, to help you keep your mind set on the Savior this Christmastime, remember some of the titles He has been given in Scripture. Jesus is:

- *Immanuel* (Matt. 1:23). Jesus' Hebrew name means "God is with us." The indescribably awesome, infinite Lord of all that exists took on a form like ours and dwelt among us. Through His Holy Spirit, He is with us in every circumstance you and I will ever encounter. Therefore, we are never alone. Regardless of where we are or what we experience, we are assured of His wonderful, powerful, loving presence.
- *Our Prince of Peace* (Is. 9:6). Even when our hectic schedules and overwhelming responsibilities increase during this blessed season, we are assured tranquility in our relationship with Christ. He can speak solace into our circumstances though everything around us is in chaos.
- *The Light of the World* (John 8:12). Although you and I may experience difficulties and dark moments, He lights the way for us. He assures us that if we will faithfully walk with Him, we will not remain in darkness—He will illuminate our path and lead us to the answers we need for all of our concerns.
- *Our Great High Priest* (Heb. 4:14). He is the holy One who shared in our humanity and bridges the gap between us and the Father—ushering us into a relationship with Him and teaching us His ways. He makes intercession for us, understands our human weaknesses, and has the ability and knowledge to meet our every need. Therefore, there is no one better to teach us how to live.
- *The King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (Rev. 19:16). He is the sovereign ruler over all that exists. No problem is too large or daunting for Him. We can always trust He

will act in our best interest—with love, grace and wisdom. Therefore, He is our perfect leader, who always guides us on the path to triumph.

- *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). He is our Deliverer, Redeemer and Savior who does what we could never do for ourselves. He reconciles us to the Father and breaks the hold sin and death have over us. Because He has defeated these—our greatest foes—we can be certain that nothing we will ever experience will hinder His perfect presence and provision in our lives.

Reasons to Remember

Truly Jesus is worthy of your focus, worship and praise—both at Christmas and always. He is with you—your Prince of Peace, the Light that guides you, your Great High Priest, your Lord and King, and the One who willingly delivers you from all your sins and burdens.

Of course, there is so much more that accompanies the great gift we were given at Christmas that it would take eternity to understand and appreciate it all. There is the Holy Spirit, who seals you for the day of redemption and guarantees He will never leave or forsake you (Eph. 1:13-14; Heb. 13:5-6). There is the plan and purpose for which the Father created you (Jer. 29:11-13). There is your eternal home in heaven where you will always be accepted and welcomed (John 14:1-3). And that merely scratches the surface of what He has provided.

The question is: *This Christmas, will you remember and think about His awesome gift to you?*

Throughout my life, there have been times when disappointments and trials could have taken the joy out of Christmas. But when I focused on God and His astounding provision, all those heartaches faded away. I couldn't help but celebrate.

I can honestly say that His gift has only become more

precious, real and wonderful to me as time has gone by. The more I recall and dwell upon it, the more joy and satisfaction it gives because I am growing closer to Him. My prayer is that you will discover the same to be true this holiday season and every day of your life

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